

CHAPTER 6 CLASS HANDOUTS

Note: Your instructor may ask you to download, print out, and/or e-mail the following class handouts for this chapter:

FRIENDLY TEASING OR VERBAL HARRASSMENT?

INTERACTIVE PROBES FOR “FRIENDLY TEASING...?”

A CRITICAL INCIDENT: FRIENDLY TEASING OR VERBAL HARRASSMENT?*

A few months ago **Jessica Martinez** had just graduated from a well-respected local university with a degree in mass communications. She had several offers, but the most exciting, not to mention the one closest to home, was with TechnoloComm. She was hired in the human resources office to work on internal newsletters and publicity.

Everything went well for the first week or two, and then something happened that made her question her job and the organization. It was last Monday morning, when she joined a conversation with her coworkers, **Peter** and **Alex**. Peter and Alex were working together on other projects. She saw them in the coffee room, and thought it was a great chance to get to know them.

First Episode: “Hi, Jessica,” said Peter enthusiastically. “We were just talking about the big street party last weekend.” “Yeah,” chimed in Alex. “I was really frustrated because I couldn’t get into my neighborhood. Did you experience the same problem?” After pausing, he added, “I guess not, since you probably don’t live on the north side of town.”

“Yeah, you must live in the el barrio, right?” questioned Peter, making sure to try to give a Latin twist to “el barrio.” Jessica felt her face flush, nodded slightly, and faked a laugh. Jessica lived with her family in a traditionally Hispanic area of town and would never want to live anywhere else. Her neighborhood was *home*. It was where she had grown up and where she knew everyone.

Before she could think of a good response, the men headed back to their desks. Jessica’s gut-reaction was: “Why do they assume I live in the barrio? I *could* live anywhere, I just don’t want to, and my family doesn’t want to either.” After thinking about the conversation for a while, though, she decided to try to forget it, thinking, “It might be a verbal misunderstanding, I just need to focus on my own job.”

Second Episode: A week later, the three of them bumped into each other again in the coffee room on a Monday morning. Peter asked “Hey, guys, how was your weekend?” Alex replied: “Great! I got together with my family and had a surf and turf barbecue.” Jessica responded: “Sounds yummy. I love barbecue!” Peter commented, “I’m surprised to hear that.”

With a surprising and innocent tone, Jessica asked: “Why’s that?” Peter replied: “Well, you know I’ve always heard that Hispanics don’t like to barbecue.”

Jessica responded with an irritated voice, “And, pray tell, why not?” “Well,” Peter said, “because the beans fall through the grill!” At this point, both Peter and Alex started laughing as Jessica responded with total disgust: “You guys are totally hopeless!” and she walked away with her heart pounding.

*Source: Adapted from Mary Meares and John Oetzel (2004). "A Case of Mistreatment at Work?" In Joann Keyton and Pamela Shockley-Zalabak, *Case Studies for Organizational Communication*. Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury.

NAME: _____

**INTERACTIVE PROBES FOR “FRIENDLY
TEASING OR VERBAL HARRASSMENT?”**
(Ask yourself and probe your classmates’ reactions)

(NOTE: See “Chapter 6 Class Handouts” for a printable form containing these questions.)

1. What happened in this critical incident? How would you analyze the case? To what extent can you relate to Jessica’s experience?
2. In both conversations, were they merely friendly teasing or casual jokes? Did both episodes involve language misunderstandings?
3. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 = strongly disagree and 10 = strongly agree, how would you rate the first episode as a verbal harassment episode? Why?
4. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 = strongly disagree and 10 = strongly agree, how would you rate the second episode as a verbal harassment episode? Why?
5. Given what you know about connotative meanings and language pragmatic rules, what would you say to Peter, Alex, and Jessica?